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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the nature and scope of current staff development activities and their relation to better teaching or school improvement in a representative sample of school districts and private schools in Arizona and southern parts of California and Nevada. Findings are based on telephone discussions with 72 administrators in the region. A brief report on the status quo of staff development is followed by a delineation of three general categories: (1) school-based mandatory staff development, whose purpose is to maintain smooth operation of the school (i.e., orientation sessions or previews of instructional materials); (2) district-sponsored staff development workshops for professional development of teachers or administrators; and (3) coursework offered by colleges or universities. Other topics discussed include the use of outside consultants, determination of topics for training sessions, the effects of reduced school funding, and staff development for test interpretation. The final section presents administrators' views of the limitations of the "workshop" format, along with current recommendations from several commissions for sustained activities in collaborative school planning for teachers and administrators. Appendixes provide (1) examples of kinds of staff development, (2) categorized frequency status, and (3) enrollment sizes and locations of the districts participating in the inquiry. (TE)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT, BETTER TEACHING, AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Aaron Buchanan and Patricia Bachelor

ABSTRACT

The nature and scope of current staff development activities was queried for a representative sample of school districts and private schools located in Arizona and the southern parts of California and Nevada. The relationship of this investment of time and effort to increased professional productivity in terms of better teaching and school improvement is discussed.

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT, BETTER TEACHING, AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Aaron Buchanan and Patricia Bachelor

Each year, school districts and private schools in this country sponsor, at considerable cost, a substantial amount of activity known as "staff development" or "inservice," intended to help teachers and administrators do what they are supposed to do better, and thereby improve the general operation of schools and the management of instruction in individual classrooms. Taken together, these activities add up to an effort of enormous variety that includes orientation sessions, workshops, and courses offered through colleges and universities. Topics include specific matters such as "Coping with Mid-winter Blahs," "Concept Spelling," "Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation," "Teaching to the Right Brain (or left brain)," "English in the 80's," "Power Writing," "Time on Task," "Micro-computers," "Testing Slow Learners," and "Assertive Discipline." Topics also include more general matters such as problem solving in mathematics, use of aides in special education, reading comprehension, and improving the involvement of parents. How staff development is currently being handled and how the activity contributes to schooling improvement was queried via telephone conversations with school administrators in Arizona, Southern California, and Southern Nevada.

Method

Seventy-two administrators from across SWRL's geographic region were contacted by telephone during February 1983 to find out more about formal

staff development that they regularly provide during the school year. These public school districts and private schools were selected at random from a list of all schools in thirteen counties of Southern California, Clark County in Southern Nevada, and all counties in Arizona. Within each of the selected school districts, the administrator who seemed most likely to be responsible for "staff development" or "inservice" was identified from a list, obtained from Market Data Retrieval, of all administrators--a list that included one or more job classifications for each administrator. In some cases, the administrator who was contacted did not have primary responsibility for staff development and referred the caller to another administrator who did. (For private schools, the principal or headmaster was contacted.) In each telephone conversation, the purpose was to raise for professional colloquy some specific topics regarding staff development or inservice, rather than to solicit "answers" to "questions."

Brief Status Quo

These days, staff development is a service provided by schools and districts to teachers and, to a lesser extent, school principals and central-office administrators. In most cases, the purpose is to give individual teachers and administrators an opportunity to improve their personal skills, with varying degrees of faith that schooling as a whole will benefit.

Many schools and districts still refer to staff development as "inservice," reflecting an older and more traditional notion that teachers, especially, would continue their formal preparation on the job.

"Staff development" actually began in many districts with the advent of special federally-funded programs where it was thought that schools had few who could work successfully with children and adolescents having special needs without a fair amount of additional training.

Almost all of the staff development that school districts and independent schools provide for teachers and administrators occurs during the school year. Activities at the beginning of the year are usually limited to orientation and startup sessions. This orientation lasts anywhere from a half day to as long as two or three days. A small amount of staff development work comes during the summer, but it almost always consists of workshops sponsored by a school or district where teacher participation is voluntary or it is college and university coursework that teachers initiate themselves.

Few school administrators now make much distinction between staff development and inservice and, even when they do, the nature of the distinction is inconsistent from one school or district to another. There is some tendency to associate inservice more with voluntary workshops that teachers and administrators take for professional development and to regard staff development as mandated activity for installation and improvement of specific programs; but these distinctions are seldom very clear in the kinds of staff development or inservice activities that are actually carried out. Although one might think that staff development would mean something different to large school districts, with literally thousands of teachers and administrators, than it does to smaller districts and private schools, there is little

difference reflected in the comments of school administrators. Large school districts having 25,000 students or more can often do things for themselves that small districts and private schools must either buy elsewhere or do without, but the difference is mainly one of scale. There are exceptions, of course. Smaller school systems often have less responsibility to serve students having limited proficiency in speaking English or special physical or mental handicaps, but overall they seem to provide about the same kinds of staff development as larger school districts.

Three Types of Staff Development

Different forms of staff development appear to be a mixture of three things that schools offer or teachers do, but it is hard to classify specific examples of staff development neatly into any set of categories. First, there is a kind of staff development initiated by the school administration whose primary benefit is for the district or school itself. Most often, the purpose is to smooth out the operation of schooling during the year as in, for example, the orientation session that all teachers (or sometimes just new ones) are required to attend at the beginning of the school year. Other examples, although they are less common, are the "how to use it" previews schools often provide before new textbooks or other materials are introduced into classroom use. These are sessions that all teachers (or all teachers who are affected) are required to attend, which makes this kind of staff development unusual. These days, mandatory staff development sessions are used cautiously by school administrators. In some school districts, they are barely used at all.

Second, and much more common, is the staff development workshop--sponsored by districts (in some cases, they are actually conducted by district staff) primarily for the professional development of individual teachers or administrators. Sometimes, workshops are mandatory sessions for all teachers, but usually they are voluntary. Teachers attend them on their own time, and they may or may not get "credits" toward advancement in salary on the school's or district's salary schedule, depending on local policies that seem to vary quite a lot from one district (or independent school) to another.

Third, teachers often take coursework offered by a college or university. Often, teachers initiate this kind of activity themselves, with little involvement by the school or district. Sometimes, courses are set up through cooperation between a college or university and the local district, so that enrollment is restricted to staff members from the district. Often, this means that a course sponsored by the local district is taught by a member of the district staff, but academic credit for the work is given by the cooperating college or university. It's not always easy to distinguish between school-sponsored professional workshops and university-based coursework, because colleges and universities occasionally concentrate instruction into very brief periods of time. In other words workshops are a lot alike regardless of who sponsors them, who actually provides the instruction, and whether or not the participants get academic professional credits. On the other hand, college and university coursework extends into much broader forms of instruction. While workshops focus on one or two major topics, coursework usually

covers many topics. Instruction is stretched out over a relatively long period, with plenty of time in between sessions for students to do independent reading and study. Many administrators do not regard coursework taken by teachers and administrators as staff development, especially where the work is done to meet requirements for a teaching credential or an advanced degree. But some administrators do, even though teachers may have enrolled in one course or another entirely on their own.

These general categories are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

TYPES OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Institution Oriented	
Participation:	More likely to be mandatory than voluntary
Sponsorship:	District or school
Content:	Specific programs of the school or district or specific aspects of school or district organization and management
Scheduling:	Usually done during regular school hours
Incentive:	None, if staff development is on school time. If staff development is scheduled outside regular school hours, teachers are paid.
Institution Sponsored/Individual Oriented	
Participation:	More likely to be voluntary
Sponsorship:	District or school
Content:	Most likely to be single-topic workshops aimed at personal/professional development of individual teachers or administrators
Scheduling:	More likely to be outside regular school hours
Incentive:	More likely to be salary credits
Individual Initiated	
Participation:	Voluntary
Sponsorship:	College or university
Content:	More likely to be multi-topic coursework although workshops are fairly common
Scheduling:	Outside regular school hours
Incentive:	Academic/professional credits

Importance of Outside Consultants

About half of the work in staff development is obtained by schools or districts from outside consultants, but the amount varies somewhat depending on district size. Very large districts with 25,000 or more students tend to do most of their own workshops and training sessions, because it is cost effective for them to maintain a large staff whose main responsibility is staff development.

Small-to-moderate-sized districts get most of their staff development from individual consultants, which is consistent with the small number of administrators they can maintain in the central office. As one would expect, very small rural districts with fewer than 600 students either buy their staff development from consultants or take advantage of services provided by county and state offices, but the important point is that they do allow opportunities for formal staff development. For example, training sessions on the use of micro-computers in classroom instruction, an immediately popular topic for staff development workshops, are not beyond the reach of even the smallest and most remote rural districts. Very often, they are provided by the sales representative of the company that sold or would like to sell the equipment to the school or district.

Large (but not "very large") school districts, with somewhere between 10,000 to 25,000 students, appear to buy more staff development from outside consultants than their size and their capacity to maintain a large staff of administrators would suggest. On the other hand, private schools, which, by their small size one might expect to get a lot of

staff development from consultants, tend to do most of their own. Maybe this happens because many private schools are church-sponsored, so a lot of in-house staff development is needed for ecclesiastical matters, or it may simply be a case where independent schools have budgets that are too tight to allow for many outside services.

Textbook publishers provide a certain amount of "outside" staff development, usually, in conjunction with an adoption of a new textbook series. Often, this kind of activity is independent of the district's department that regularly does staff development, especially in districts who serve very many students. More likely, it is arranged for or conducted by subject-matter specialists in the area covered by the textbook or textbook series.

How Topics are Determined

Who decides the agenda of planning or training sessions that will be offered to teachers and administrators during the school year? In recent years, staff development has become an issue in contract negotiations between teachers and the school board. In many districts, teachers have asked for and obtained authority in part or in whole for deciding how much staff development will be offered and the types of services or coursework that will be available. However, what is most likely to be working in most districts is a rather formal process for deciding what and how much to offer. Usually there's a committee of teachers and administrators that decides how money set aside for staff development will be spent. Often, the process involves formal surveying, especially in larger districts, where it is common for teachers and administrators

to be polled every two or three years. The process is more informal in smaller districts and especially in independent schools, but the cast of players is about the same. Often, the role of staff development committees is to select from a menu of pre-packaged workshops that can be obtained from outside consultants. The committee also decides how to act on requests or proposals for staff development that come from individual schools or departments within the district.

Some districts have a very formal organization for doing staff development. One administrator from a large school district reported that the district had just created a Staff Development Institute that concentrates all of the district's activities in one place. Within the Institute, the activities range from special work on improvement of basic skills, provided on site at individual schools, to formal workshop packages presented at the Institute itself by outside consultants or by staff members assigned directly to the Institute.

Within school districts, staff development is largely a district-initiated matter, although a certain amount of specific service is often provided to local schools on request. The basic tendency is for staff development to be put in place at the district level, even in very large districts with complex organizations, but there are exceptions. Approximately 20% of the school administrators reported that substantial staff development within their district was carried out by local schools more or less independent of the district's central administrative staff.

Effects of Reduced School Funding

Staff development does not appear to have been affected much by tight budgets or in some cases, general reductions in funding. A little

more than 10% of the administrators felt they were doing less staff development than last year, while about one-third of them thought their district was doing more. In isolated cases, budget cutbacks have led to rather severe reductions in staff development. (One administrator reported that staff development had been eliminated entirely for the 1982-83 school year.) Whether or not staff development has been reduced appears to depend to some degree on district size. Almost half of the administrators who reported reductions in staff development for this year come from the very large school districts with more than 25,000 students.

Budgets seem to be a major factor in the kind of staff development that districts are able to provide, due in large part to special provisions that must be made whenever teachers' participation in staff development is mandatory. The usual practices are either to provide enough substitute teachers so that regular teachers can be released from classes in small numbers at any one time, or to send students home early on "minimum teaching days," or to have an "extended" day for teachers. Some schools simply schedule staff development during non-school hours. This means, in most cases, that the staff development they provide is voluntary or that teachers receive extra pay for their participation.

Staff Development and School Testing

With all of the attention that schools are giving to basic skills and student tests, one might think that a lot of staff development would focus on the interpretation and use of test scores. Most, but certainly not all, school districts set some time aside for work on test scores, but it's mainly focused on how to "read scores" and not on how to use

them to make changes in classroom instruction. Sometimes interpretation of scores is done as formal staff development at the district level; other times local schools look at test scores on their own. In many districts, interpretation of test scores falls under the jurisdiction of the division or office designated for regular staff development, but many districts assign responsibility to other divisions such as Research and Evaluation, Office of Testing, or Curriculum and Instruction. Most of the interpretation of test scores is done in conjunction with state-mandated testing programs.

What is Missing

Staff development is generally viewed by administrators as an effort to "improve schools," but mostly in an indirect way where the improvement of the professional skills of teachers is hoped to filter up gradually and accumulate over several years into beneficial effects for local schools and school programs. Schools spend most of the time providing for development of individual staff members by extending their undergraduate preparation, by encouraging them to keep abreast of new methods, materials and technology, and by simply providing occasional cpportunities to take a break from day to day classroom routines. On the other hand, they don't spend much time in direct development of a staff. What appears absent are sustained activities that engage teachers and administrators in collaborative school planning, the kind of intensive work that builds collective expertise within a staff charged with responsibility for planning and presenting instruction. The imbalance is understandable when one considers that effective school planning requires

an effort that extends throughout the school year and does not conform very well to a "workshop" format.

The pre-packaged workshop, to which schools and districts have become so accustomed, is usually too general to deal with planning and presenting particularized local instruction, that is particularized to the characteristics of a local school or district, including the capabilities and personality of the local staff, especially when it's done by an outside consultant. Why these pre-packaged workshops have proliferated is hard to know exactly, but as much as anything they owe their popularity to the fact that they provide a little something for everyone. By relying heavily on workshops, a district may simply be buying as much variety in staff development as they can with a limited budget. Moreover, workshops seem as if they are cost effective; a large number of staff members can be involved and scheduling is one-time-only; so the effort is a fairly easy one that causes minimal disruption of the day-to-day schedules of students and teachers. Disruptions in schedules are expensive. Almost always, they require the district or school to either hire substitutes or to provide additional pay for teachers. School districts have been able to make good use of the "minimum day," but, at best, the number of such days is minimal.

Although it is common these days to see use of the terms "staff development," "inservice," and "school improvement" run together almost interchangeably, it is also misleading. "Staff development" and "inservice" are supporting parts of "school improvement" in almost anybody's rationale. In practice, things are a little different.

Current recommendations from several commissions looking at U.S. schools have placed better teaching close to the heart of school improvement (they call it excellence), but "better teaching" is being viewed by almost everybody as better individual teachers. Here's where inservice comes into the picture. Historically, "inservice" has meant additional training for new teachers and refresher work for existing ones. Other professions do this as an ordinary matter so no criticism implied. (Actually, there's a lot of implied criticism in current national recommendations for fixing schools, with strong suggestions that many teachers need remediation and, especially, retraining, but school administrators don't seem to have been caught up in this, at least not yet.) Therefore, as far as teachers are concerned, there is little distinction between inservice and school improvement; one is a logical extension of the other.

But is there something else called staff development that is actually going on now in many districts and schools? Most school administrators don't seem to see it, and neither do most proponents of "school improvement initiatives." Nevertheless, "better teaching" can also be viewed as better collaborative planning and program management by existing school staff. Whether or not it's called "staff development" is unimportant. What is important is that this critical, but separate, construct not be left out in new architectures for school improvement.

APPENDIX

EXAMPLES OF KINDS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT THAT WILL BE PROVIDED BY DISTRICTS (OR PRIVATE SCHOOLS) DURING THIS SCHOOL YEAR

- Clinical Teaching
- Clinical Supervision for Aides, Teachers and Administrators
- Principles and Policies in Child Development
- Coping with Mid-winter Blahs
- Child Behavior Management
- Health, Safety, and Dealing with Emergencies
- Time and Stress Management
- Precision Teaching
- Scope and Sequence for Gifted Students
- Computer Literacy Workshop
- Three Cycles of Effective Teaching
- Concept Spelling
- Writing Across the Curriculum
- Cardiac Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
- Classroom Management
- Human Resources Development
- English in the 1980's
- Educational Skills Program (ESP)
- Teacher Inservice Program (TIP)
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Communication Between Parent and School
- Learning about Social Behavior
- Power Writing
- Holistic Scoring of Student Writing
- Assertive Discipline
- Target Teaching
- Music Inservice
- Writing Inservice
- Art Inservice
- Time-on-Task
- Teaching to an Objective
- English as a Secondary Language
- Reading Composition
- Vocabulary Development
- Math Manipulations
- Black Studies
- Mainstreaming Special Education Students

APPENDIX

EXAMPLES OF FORMAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROVIDED ON THE INTERPRETATION AND USE OF TEST SCORES

- District staff provides information on interpretation of SES (Survey of Essential Skills) scores
- Director of Research, Testing, Information, and Data Services provides a review on interpretation of results
- Data analysis packets are prepared
- Informal meeting between Principals, schedule informal meetings with teachers and parents
- Workshops are provided on the interpretation of CAT (California Achievement Test) scores
- Inservice training is provided on how curriculum relates to content
- Special education teachers receive ongoing training
- Director of Assessment provides inservice
- Principals set plans and establish educational goals
- District, county, and publishers participate in inservice
- Management team plus testing and evaluation department interpret scores
- Workshops are provided on the interpretation of CAP (California Assessment Program) scores
- Administrators discuss test scores with parents
- Performance is compared with other schools using group and national norms to find weaknesses in curriculum
- Inservice is provided by test coordinators and administrators
- Consultants review scores with teachers and parents
- State department of education provides training on CAP program
- Inservice evaluates reading test scores
- County consultant reviews test scores with staff
- Test representative or county office personnel work with administrative staff
- Principals hold site-level sessions each year when test results are released to guide staff through results, provide interpretation, and suggestions for applications
- District's curriculum office interprets and identifies weaknesses
- Workshop is provided on interpretation of CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills) scores
- Testing and Research Personnel go to each school to relate scores to state norms
- Coordinator of evaluation provides a review
- District staff provides workshops on interpretation and use

APPENDIX

CATEGORIZED FREQUENCY STATUS

Amount of staff development/inservice compared with last year

	FREQUENCY	(PERCENT)
MORE	26	(36%)
ABOUT THE SAME	37	(51%)
LESS	9	(13%)
	72	(100%)

Viewed difference between staff development and inservice

	FREQUENCY	(PERCENT)
YES	15	(21%)
NOT MUCH	10	(14%)
NO	47	(65%)
	72	(100%)

Formal attention to interpretation and use of test scores

	FREQUENCY	(PERCENT)
NO	28	(39%)
YES	37	(51%)
YES - BUT NOT BY "STAFF DEVELOPMENT"	6	(8%)
NO INFORMATION	1	(1%)
	72	(100%)

Time involvement

	FREQUENCY	(PERCENT)
MOST/ALL DONE OUTSIDE SCHOOL TIME (MOST OFTEN IT'S VOLUNTARY)	18	(25%)
MOST/ALL DONE ON SCHOOL TIME	11	(15%)
DEPENDS ON WHETHER SCHOOL REQUIRES TEACHERS TO PARTICIPATE	32	(44%)
TEACHERS DECIDE	3	(4%)
SOME DONE ON SCHOOL TIME/SOME DONE ON TEACHER'S OWN TIME (50/50)	7	(10%)
NO INFORMATION	1	(1%)
	72	(100%)

APPENDIX

ENROLLMENT SIZES OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS PARTICIPATING IN THE INQUIRY

	FREQUENCY	(PERCENT)
SIZE A (0-599)	6	(8%)
SIZE B (600-4,999)	11	(15%)
SIZE C (5,000-9,999)	13	(18%)
SIZE D (10,000-24,999)	13	(18%)
SIZE E (25,000 and over)	10	(14%)
PRIVATE AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS	16	(22%)
COUNTY OFFICES OF EDUCATION	3	(4%)
	72	(100%)

LOCATION OF SCHOOLS OR DISTRICTS BY STATE

	FREQUENCY	(PERCENT)
CALIFORNIA (13 Southern Counties)	57	79%
ARIZONA	14	19%
NEVADA (Clark County)	1	1%
	72	(100%)